

Abraham Lincoln

*Address by W. D. HOARD, before the
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Certain men are like mountains. They possess the same scenic character; the same lofty headlands of exalted duty; the same fertile valleys of love and sentiment where humanity can live and find sustenance. Within their bold and rugged outline are spots of most exquisite beauty. Alpine violets and flowers of rarest perfume bloom above their timber line. They bear their own distinctive verdure. Only to him who shall explore them with a heart loyal to the sacredness of nature, will they disclose the beauty of their heights and depths.

The gold and silver that all the world wants lie hidden in their inmost recesses. There is mystery and solitude, marvelous light and appalling darkness; wonderful cataracts and delightful stretches of quiet streams, eternal snow and melting sunshine, untold wealth and the barrenness that starves; all these elements belong to great men and great mountains. It is always refreshing to leave the dull and dusty plain and seek renewed courage and vigor in their inspiring presence.

Thank Heaven for mountains that are like men and men that are like mountains.

Did we ever look at a mountain and call it awkward? Its greatness carries it beyond such criticism. Yet an ant hill fashioned in the same outline would meet with contempt. Hence let both men and mountains maintain the shape that God gave them and be content.

Since the earliest records of human achievement, we note that the men who have been rugged, powerful and ample, have become the repositories of confidence and leadership among their fellows.

Lincoln, both physically, mentally and morally, was of this type. Contention, from earliest childhood, with a most grudging fate, taught him what smaller souls rarely learn, to look lightly on hardship, to patiently endure what he could not cure, and make friends with poverty and privation. This discipline of soul made him tolerant and catholic. He despised only human meanness. He was instinctively a man of reason. Because of this he was broadly conscientious, not only morally, but intellectually. The intellectual perception of the reason of things must be right, or the moral perception will be wrong. Hence he was first ethical and then worshipful. Reverse the operation and you have a bigot and a fanatic. Fortunate is the human soul that starts right and, from the foundations of reason, builds to himself a broadening view of God and the obligations of life.

All enduring greatness must have an ethical foundation. The aim of all human effort, of government, of trade, commerce, politics, and its resultant law, must be to establish the right. The man who makes of himself a part of this great scheme, and serves it grandly, shall partake of its immortality. Such men cannot be judged with a microscope nor analyzed by the gravimetric process.

The Hindoo said of such a man: "For it is because of thy fullness that thou art become as meat and drink to thy fellows."

All true greatness can come only through great sacrifice. Nature abhors cheap effort everywhere. She is laboriously perfect, even in the smallest detail. Before all heroic souls stands humanity's altar, on which must be laid all considerations of self.

Christ was not Christ in the fullness of his Son-ship until the supreme moment of sacrifice came, when he could pray as man never prayed before, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

There was much of this Christ-like quality in Abraham Lincoln. He strove, undaunted, until the fulfillment of his sacrifice, and always with a forgiving soul. For this the whole world has laid his memory to its heart of hearts. Liberty dwelt with him as she does with the mountains; she fed his soul; inspired his genius; entranced his vision; broadened his judgment and finally, pointing to the crouching slave, said: "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren have ye done it unto Me." This was enough for a whole history. Here again does the man and his destiny rise to a lofty altitude, and the dead level of human greed and base ambition sink out of sight.

Said his Elder Brother: "He that would lose his life shall save it."

Lincoln was a born leader among men. To this born faculty he added a wonderful comprehension of the true principles of Republican government, with the object of securing the best exercise possible of individual liberty, public order and the promotion of a sense of justice among men.

This comprehension is the basis of statesmanship. The man who possesses it in a large degree must have integrity and courage. "He who sails a ship must be obedient to the stars." He who would lead the people must be faithful and honest with himself, with principles, and with the people who trust in him, and he must have staunch courage. How few cowards there are on the battlefield and how many in places of public duty. It is about time a Loyal Legion was formed whose purpose shall be to encourage and commemorate exhibitions of civic courage and faithful adherence to civic duty. Call it, if you please, the Lincoln Legion, and make of his life and services a particular study for the encouragement of bravery in matters of public service.

Lincoln was one of the greatest politicians of American history. His forethought, skill and ability in the management of large masses of men, politically, was phenomenal. All these qualities are needed in politics, for they are the sum of all that Solomon prayed for—wisdom. There have been too few imitations among the politicians who have succeeded him, because Lincoln was honest, truthful, and far-seeing. It was the fashion, in those early days of the Republican party, to strive for a principle, to steadfastly maintain it, and wait for the people to see it. There are a few still left in the party who are so old fashioned as to believe that this is the true political doctrine, and that a defeat in defense of a righteous cause should never mean enlistment under the flag of the enemy.

As a politician, Lincoln strove to establish confidence in his leadership by being honest. The political prolificacy of these times has come by abandoning time-honored traditions and principles. Colton, in the preface to *Lacon*, has aptly characterized our present condition:

"In an age when free thinking consists not in free thinking, but in being free from thinking; when independence of principle consists in having no principle at all to depend on; when patriots will hold anything but their tongues; keep anything but their word and lose nothing so patiently as their character:—In an age like this, to improve is difficult; to instruct is dangerous, and he stands no chance of amending it who cannot at the same time amuse it."

Lincoln trusted the people, believing that when they saw the right they would do right. He always carried that rare sense of being the servant of the people, not their master. How different from the modern political boss. The low arts of lying and duplicity and all that "foul brood that gnaw from within out, leaving a man hollow to the whitewash," he knew nothing of. He reasoned simply and directly, and still how powerfully, to this proposition, "If I lead the people to the truth that shall make them free, I must be truthful to myself," and so he became the mouthpiece of God and the people.

We are in the midst of many troubles and serious misgivings. The labor question and all sorts of questions are resolutely clamoring for solution. Lincoln's way of solving the problem would be to accord justice. Greed, arrogance, money, and political bossism will never cement and preserve the American people as a nation. Simple justice will. Let us have justice and honesty, rather than ostentatious charity and falsehood.

I will speak of one more feature of this wonderful character, and close. It was his harmonizing sense of mirth and humor. There is profound philosophy in this quality of mind. It is the sweetening and tempering quality. A sense of the ludicrous is always essential to prevent us from becoming ridiculous. Lincoln used this sense with rare skill, and in obedience to the widest reason.

What could be finer than his reply to a body of querulous critics who visited him in the dark days of 1864, to complain of the conduct of the war. Not a word of suggestion or help did they offer. Nothing but criticism. It requires but very little brains to be a critic only.

Lincoln listened patiently, and said: "My friends, you remind me of my old friend, Jack Armstrong, down on the Sangamon bottom. It was a time of unfathomable mud, and Jack wanted a drink of whiskey. He lived three miles from the grocery. Finally he managed to get to the drinking place and imbibed several drinks. After dark he started home, and between whiskey and deep mud he was having a hard job to make any progress. There came up a terrible thunderstorm. It was pretty much all thunder. An occasional gleam of lightning would have been useful. A fearful crash of thunder came, which brought poor Jack to his knees and, while in that posture, he thought he would pray, and his prayer, gentlemen, I commend to your attention:

"O, Lord God, if it is all the same to you, I would like a little more light, and less noise."

His illustration of the Democratic party trying to ride into power on the Pro-Slavery question was keen and apposite. Is was this:

"In an early day a Methodist circuit rider came to a cross road in Illinois where stood a typical country boy, barefooted, pants rolled up, one suspender, and shirt bosom open. The minister was mounted on about the poorest, weakest horse that had ever been seen in those parts. Addressing the boy, he said, "My boy, which of these two roads will take me to Bloomington?" The boy paid no attention to the question; he had never seen a respectable man mounted on such a sorry steed before. The minister repeated the question. The boy looked up and replied, "Who are you?" The answer came, "I am a follower of the Lord." "Well," said the boy, "it won't make any difference which road you take. You'll never catch him with that hoss."

And so this rare man—rare in his genius, judgment, courage, honesty and kindly humor, a perfect man—God gave us as our leader and exemplar of American patriotism, American duty, American courage and American faithfulness.

